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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SMOOTH CRIMINAL? PARTY "ENEMY" OF THE PRESIDENT
EMBROILED IN SCANDAL

REF: FREETOWN 79

Classified By: Political Officer Amy LeMar for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Minister of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and the Environment, Dr. Dennis Sandy, testified before Parliament on June 5 that his ministry is the most corrupt and that Members of Parliament are involved in shady land deals. He tendered documents implicating the Majority Leader of Parliament, Hon. Eddie Turay, and Hon. Dauda Dumbuya. Turay and Dumbuya are both members of the APC, and Sandy's allegations created a furor in the House of Parliament and in the press. Some have suggested that Sandy's party, the PMDC, is taking a deliberate swipe at Turay, who was vocal in questioning the validity of Sandy's initial claims. Others, however, believe that Turay is a target because of his adversarial relationship with President Koroma. Given that numerous MPs are allegedly involved in illegal land deals, singling out one of Koroma's nemeses potentially indicates an internal APC power-play designed to either discredit Turay or end his political ambitions altogether. This could effectively destroy the cabal of APC members, including the Attorney-General, who surreptitiously seek Koroma's downfall. End Summary.

¶2. (U) PMDC party member Dr. Dennis Sandy became the Minister of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and the Environment, in the recent Cabinet reshuffle. He succeeded Capt. Benjamin O. Davies, another PMDC member, who was sacked by President Koroma. In his testimony before Parliament on June 5, Sandy said that his ministry is the most corrupt and that some Members of Parliament were involved in illegal land deals. This infuriated MPs, who told him not to make "sweeping statements" and cautioned him to substantiate his allegations with documentary proof. Turay was the most vociferous in demanding that Sandy substantiate his claims. The Speaker of Parliament, Justice Abel Stronge, upheld this request and summoned the Minister to return to Parliament with proof. On June 9, Minister Sandy appeared again to present documents alleging that Turay and Dumbuya illegally possess approximately 60 and 84 acres of land respectively (Note: Post is waiting for information from contacts on the robustness of this "evidence." End Note). According to the laws of Sierra Leone no individual can acquire more than three town lots of land.

¶3. (U) Per his constitutional right, Stronge appointed an eleven-man committee to look into the allegations made by the Minister of Lands on June 23. The Committee has been mandated to investigate, examine, evaluate, and report on the specific allegations presented by Sandy regarding Turay and Dumbuya, and will report back to the House on July 9. The committee is comprised of four APC MPs, three MPs from the SLPP, two from the PMDC, and two Paramount Chiefs who are non-partisan Members of Parliament.

¶4. (C) Turay has been vocal in blaming members of his own APC

party and some members of the PMDC of plotting to discredit him. As the party leader and Presidential candidate in 1996, he remains a powerful figure within the APC. There are talks that he is still nursing an ambition to become President, though he was passed over for Koroma in 2007. His noted bitterness about Koroma's ascendancy led to a court case involving several "old school" members of the APC, who claimed that Koroma's leadership violated the party's constitution. The law suit was quietly settled out of court, with Turay becoming the Majority Leader and Abdul Serry-Kamal receiving the Minister of Justice/Attorney-General position following Koroma's Presidential victory. Turay's theory on this situation appears to be that he is being deliberately targeted by Minister Sandy at the behest of the President or his internal APC supporters. He has so far ignored the fact that he loudly and vehemently demanded proof of the Minister's initial, general allegations, thus making himself an attractive target.

¶5. (C) The PMDC party, though historically weak and seemingly on a continuous downhill slide, are showing surprising mettle. Party leader Charles Margai, still a popular political figure throughout the country, is standing firmly behind Sandy. Margai attended Sandy's sessions and publicly congratulated him outside Parliament. He also said in a radio interview that he does not give instructions to the Minister, but has a "moral responsibility to protect (a member of his party)." It is possible that Margai simply wants to prove that Ministers from his party are effective (Note: The PMDC lost two Cabinet seats in the reshuffle, per reftel. End Note), but could also be currying favor with the President by deliberately targeting Turay. Public opinion demonstrates that Koroma's popularity has not waned since his election,

and many consider him a lock to win another 5 year term in ¶2012. Margai may be positioning himself and his party for further responsibilities in the future. If the evidence against Turay is inconclusive, however, Minister Sandy will have a difficult time holding on to his position.

¶6. (C) Comment: Eddie Turay considers himself and his few remaining allies, like the AG, to be "true" APC members. They stayed with the party through its pariah years, and truly believe that it is their turn to run both the party and the country. Koroma, considered an up-start for only joining the party after flirting with others, has been constantly under fire from Turay and the AG since he took office. Though neither would overtly threaten the presidency, both have acted behind the scenes to undermine Koroma's authority and political momentum. The AG, in particular, has deliberately used his position to jeopardize major bilateral activities and potential Koroma-credited successes. Should Turay be found guilty by the Parliamentary Committee of illegal land holding, he will face criminal charges and lose his parliamentary seat. The damage to his political reputation would doubtless end his career and leave only the AG to represent the APC stalwarts who refuse to evolve with their party. Turay's downfall could dissipate the internal APC power struggle and leave Koroma and his supporters the chance to address the true task at hand: governing. End Comment.
FEDZER